REMARKS

Claims 21-39 are pending in this application. For purposes of expedition, claims 10-20 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer in favor of claims 21-39, as newly added, to clearly define Applicants' disclosed invention relative to cited prior art of record and to assist the Examiner to expedite compact prosecution of the instant application.

Claims 10-20 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Hirotaka, Japanese Patent No. 8106439, as modified to incorporate selected features from Computer Product Update Journal article entitled "CA launches link to spreadsheet and group scheduling packages" and Hotaling, U.S. Patent No. 5,124,912, a prior art previously cited in the parent application Serial No. 08/931,655, filed on September 16, 1997, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,974,394, for reasons stated on pages 2-8 of the Office Action (Paper No. 25). For purposes of expedition, claims 10-20, as previously discussed, have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer to render the rejection moot.

Claims 21-39 have been newly added to emphasize on the "multistageous idle-time retrieval" feature as allowed in the parent application Serial No. 08/931,655, filed on September 16, 1997, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,974,394, in order to clearly distinguish over the cited prior art, including Hirotaka, Japanese Patent No. 8106439; the Computer Product Update Journal article entitled "CA launches link to spreadsheet and group scheduling packages"; and Hotaling, U.S. Patent No. 5,124,912 to place in condition for allowance. Generally, claims 21-39 seek to

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perform the idle-time retrieval on one group, and then perform the further idle-time

retrieval on other group using the previous retrieval result as a retrieval condition.

For example, base claims 21 and 33, as newly added, define a computer

readable medium and a schedule retrieval method, performed in a server apparatus

coupled to terminal apparatuses allocated to schedule-reserving persons and

schedule-reserved persons through a communication line, for retrieving idle time of a

schedule, comprising the steps of:

> transmitting data to said terminal apparatus and receiving data
> from said terminal apparatuses;
> dividing each of schedules registered for a plurality of persons
> and a plurality of equipments into a plurality of groups; and
> retrieving common idle time from one of said plurality of groups
> to make an idle-time retrieval result be a following retrieval condition for
> retrieving idle time from the schedule of another one of said plurality of
> groups.

Similarly, base claim 28, as newly added, defines a scheduling management

method, in a system having a schedule server and a plurality of remote client

devices, comprising the steps of:

> storing, at the schedule server, schedules of participants and
> schedules of equipments reserved by ones of said participants in
> databases, dividing schedules registered for participants and
> equipments into a plurality of groups, and retrieving an idle time
> common from one group as a retrieval condition for retrieving an idle
> time common for another group of said plurality of groups; and
> allowing, at the plurality of remote client devices, client users to
> input schedules of said participants and requesting an idle time
> retrieval from the schedule server.

As generally defined in each of Applicants' base claims 21, 28 and 33, a

schedule retrieval and management method, as shown in FIG. 1 and FIG. 2, is

utilized to permit a user to retrieve idle time of a schedule of different groups (of

participants and equipments) multistageously, that is, a common idle time from one

group as a following retrieval condition for retrieving idle time from the schedule of another group. In other words, retrieval is performed in groups, and the retrieval result is used as the retrieval condition in the next retrieval on the "preferential" group in order to reduce the number of retrievals. As a result, idle time can be retrieved so that the significance of the participants and equipments is satisfied. For example, each scheduled subject (i.e., participant or equipment) may be classified as "essential", "optional" or "selective" depending on the degree of significance, as shown in FIG. 5. The idle time retrieval is performed not only on the "essential" members but also the "optional" member, while the retrieval results are handled differently.

The grouping of participants and/or equipments in the order of their such as "essential", "preferential", and "optional" is well defined in each of Applicants' dependent claims 22, 32 and 34. For example, dependent claims 22, 32 and 34 further define an idle time retrieval in which "degrees of significance are given to participants respectively so that schedules of said participants are grouped in the order of said degree of significance to thereby retrieve the idle time corresponding to said degree of significance among different groups".

In contrast to Applicants' claims 21-39, Hirotaka (JP-A-8-106439) discloses only a portable information terminal provided with a schedule access means 8 which allows a user to inquire a schedule of another user, via an external computer; a schedule response means 9 which sends back schedule information according the user's inquiry; and a free time retrieval means 10 which retrieves the common free time of the another user. In other words, Hirotaka '439 discloses the concept of a person-base idle time retrieval, and does **not** teach grouping.

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According to Hirotaka '439, the schedule of each person is stored in each user computer. If one person (user) would like to know schedules of three other users, the schedule request operation and the schedule read-out operation are repeated three times for the three users. As shown in FIGs. 13 and 16, the idle time retrieval is performed by (1) collecting the schedules of related people as mentioned above, (2) performing OR-operation of "occupied time" in the schedules, and (3) excluding the OR-operation result time zone from entire time zone. However, such free time retrieval is **not** "multistageous idle-time retrieval" as defined in Applicants' base claims 21, 28 and 33.

As secondary references, the Computer Product Update article entitled "CA Launches Link to Spreadsheet and Group Scheduling Packages" and Hotaling, U.S. Patent No. 5,124,912 do **not** remedy the noted deficiencies of Hirotaka '439.

For example, the Computer Product Update article entitled "CA Launches Link to Spreadsheet and Group Scheduling Packages" describes a technique to collectively search or manage the users' calendars as a group. However, such an article does **not** disclose or suggest the use of the retrieval result from one group as a retrieval condition for retrieving idle time from another group.

Likewise, Hotaling '912 does **not** disclose or suggest the above-mentioned multistageous retrieval. As previously explained in the parent application Serial No. 08/931,655, filed on September 16, 1997, now issued as U.S. Patent No. 5,974,394, Hotaling '912 discloses a computer system 13 providing a meeting management service 19 integrated with Electronic Mail, Calendar Service, User Administration and Directory Services, among other applications and databases, see lines 5-18, column 3. The Meeting management 19 employs a meeting file 17 as shown in Fig. 2, a

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scheduling file 47 and Directory Services to define and schedule optimal meeting dates and times. Invitations are sent by Electronic Mail 21, and the meeting is temporarily noted in each invitees record in the scheduling file 47.

If a user chooses not to participate, no information from his/her personal calendar is stored in schedule file 47, and therefore, his/her personal schedule is not used in the scheduling process to find the optical meeting date and time. That user is listed as non-critical to any meetings. However, if the user chooses to participate, the meeting file 17 is available for the user to initiate the scheduling of a new meeting in terms of time, date, invitee and other information about the meeting, modify a listed meeting etc... Location of the meeting such as a system directory conference room as well as room capacity and equipments used can also be scheduled or rescheduled. Each item can be scheduled as "critical" or "non-critical" to the meeting. The meeting management schedule 19 then determines common available dates and times of all the critical specified items including invitees, equipments and meeting locations. The scheduling of non-critical invitees will not influence the scheduling process to optimize a meeting date and time as described in column 5, lines 25-30. Query processor is used to evaluate critical participants in order of people (invitees), then conference rooms, and lastly equipment, as described in column 9, lines 3-33. When all possible meeting times are evaluated for each critical participant, a list of top five most acceptable solutions for the optimum meeting time and time is provided for selection.

However, Hotaling '912 does **not** disclose or suggest Applicants' schedule retrieval technique and the use of a "multistageous idle-time retrieving means" in the manner defined in each of Applicants' base claims 21, 28 and 33.

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In view of the foregoing amendments, noted deficiencies in the Examiner's proposed combination of Hirotaka, Japanese Patent No. 8106439; the Computer Product Update Journal article entitled "CA launches link to spreadsheet and group scheduling packages"; and Hotaling, U.S. Patent No. 5,124,912, and remarks, Applicants believe that all claims 21-39 are now deemed to be allowable and this application is believed to be in condition to be passed to issue. Should any questions remain unresolved, the Examiner is requested to telephone Applicants' attorney at the Washington DC area office at (703) 312-6600.

INTERVIEW:

In the interest of expediting prosecution of the present application, Applicants respectfully request that an Examiner interview be scheduled and conducted. In accordance with such interview request, Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner, after review of the present Amendment, contact the undersigned local Washington, D.C. area attorney at the local Washington, D.C. telephone number (703) 312-6600 for scheduling an Examiner interview, or alternatively, refrain from issuing a further action in the above-identified application as the undersigned attorneys will be telephoning the Examiner shortly after the filing date of this Amendment in order to schedule an Examiner interview. Applicants thank the Examiner in advance for such considerations. In the event that this Amendment, in and of itself, is sufficient to place the application in condition for allowance, no Examiner interview may be necessary.
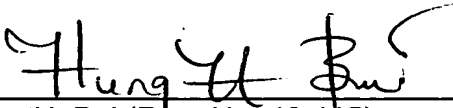
To the extent necessary, Applicants petition for an extension of time under 37 CFR §1.136. Please charge any shortage of fees due in connection with the filing of

this paper, including extension of time fees, to the Deposit Account of Antonelli,

Terry, Stout & Kraus, No. 01-2135 (Application No. 500.35669CX1), and please

credit any excess fees to said deposit account.

Respectfully submitted,

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